

# South Dakota National Guard

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October 16, 2015

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **SD Guard honors code talkers with traveling exhibit**

By Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann  
SDNG Public Affairs Office

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota National Guard diversity council, in partnership with community organizations, held the first of four Oceti Sakowin (Oh-CHAY-tee Shaw-KOE-ween) Code Talker celebrations to be held throughout the state at the Pierre Indian Learning Center, Oct. 14.

The celebrations honor the 67 Native American code talkers from South Dakota who helped win World War I and World War II by confusing the Germans with their Dakota/Lakota language. The celebrations feature a traveling exhibit “Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever” that honors the code talkers, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military.

“We wanted to do this because it helps integrate the Native American culture into the military,” said 1st Lt. Carstin Jerzak, SDNG state equal employment manager. “Our diversity council puts on programs or traveling exhibits like this one throughout the year to help provide inclusion and understanding of our different cultures among our service members in the South Dakota National Guard.”

The exhibit includes tribal flags and seven medallions honoring the Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Oglala, Rosebud, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Standing Rock and Yankton tribes. Another medallion, honoring the Lower Brule Tribe, is yet to be revealed as it is still being designed.

The Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 required the Secretary of the Treasury to strike Congressional Medals in recognition of the dedication and valor of Native American code talkers.

“Under the Act, unique gold medals were crafted and pressed for each Native American tribe member who served as code talkers,” said Master Sgt. James Badwound, emcee of the event.

Badwound added that gold medals went to each tribe. Silver duplicates were presented to specific code talkers or their next of kin. In addition, bronze duplicates were made available for sale.

The keynote speaker for the event, Brig. Gen. Kevin Griese, assistant adjutant general for the South Dakota Army National Guard, spoke about the importance of the code talker’s role.

The United States first used Native American code talkers during World War I in October 1918 and it was a secret tactic up until 1968, said Griese.

“Native American code talkers had a unique capability that had a lasting impact on history,” said Griese. “It is an honor to help celebrate the long-overdue recognition they clearly deserved.”

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The family of code talker Edmund St. John of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe attended the ceremony.

“I am proud he did this for our country,” said Skylla Marks, Edmund’s granddaughter. “He kept this to himself and he never told us growing up. We found after he passed in the 90s. I am proud that he is being recognized for being a code talker and our whole community is proud and thankful for him.”

Ben Black Bear Jr., a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, showed his appreciation for the ceremony by standing up and speaking on behalf of his father-in-law who served as a code talker.

“We Lakota are now part, fully part, of the nation,” said Black Bear. “We fought for the nation, and now we’re recognized as heroes.”

The Congressional Medallion exhibit will tour several South Dakota communities in October and November in observance of Native American Heritage Month.

The exhibit will be open for public viewing from 10 a.m.–3 p.m. local time on each scheduled date along with an honor ceremony beginning at 11:11 a.m. The ceremony will include a featured speaker from the SDNG and highlight the service of code talker veterans and their families from all local tribes.

The exhibit tour will conclude with a special celebration on November 11/Veterans Day at Crazy Horse Memorial, which will include a blast honoring all veterans.

Remaining exhibit dates and locations are:

- October 21 – Watertown: Lake Area Technical Institute, 1201 Arrow Ave., Student Event Center (level 4)
- October 28 – Sioux Falls: Washington High School, gymnasium, 501 N. Sycamore Ave.
- November 11/Veterans Day – Crazy Horse Memorial, Welcome Center

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High resolution photos are available at [www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard](http://www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard)



**151014-Z-CW157-001:** Members of the Bad Nation drum group perform the Flag Song for the audience during the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration, Oct. 14, 2015, at the Pierre Indian Learning Center, in Pierre, S.D. The celebration is in honor of the 67 Native American code talkers from South Dakota who helped win World War I and World War II by confusing the Germans with their Dakota/Lakota language. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



**151014-Z-CW157-003:** Ben Black Bear Jr., a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, shows his appreciation for the ceremony speaking on behalf of his father-in-law who served as a code talker while the South Dakota Army National Guard’s Master Sgt. James Bad Wound looks on during the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration, Oct. 14, 2015, at the Pierre Indian Learning Center, in Pierre, S.D. The celebration is in honor of the 67 Native American code talkers from South Dakota who helped win World War I and World War II by confusing the Germans with their Dakota/Lakota language. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



**151014-Z-CW157-002:** U.S. Army Master Sgt. James Badwound, a member of the South Dakota Army National Guard, talks to the audience about the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008, during the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration, Oct. 14, 2015, at the Pierre Indian Learning Center, in Pierre, S.D. The celebration was in honor of the 67 Native American code talkers from South Dakota who helped win World War I and World War II by confusing the Germans with their Dakota/Lakota language. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



**151014-Z-CW157-004:** The family of code talker Edmund St. John stand next to the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe flag and medallion during the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration, Oct. 14, 2015, at the Pierre Indian Learning Center, in Pierre, S.D. The celebration was in honor of the 67 Native American code talkers from South Dakota who helped win World War I and World War II by confusing the Germans with their Dakota/Lakota language. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



**151014-Z-CW157-005:** The traveling exhibit "Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever" is displayed at the Pierre Learning Center in Pierre, S.D., Oct 14, 2015. The exhibit honors the 67 South Dakota code talkers, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. The exhibit includes tribal flags and seven medallions honoring the Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Oglala, Rosebud, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Standing Rock and Yankton tribes. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



**151014-Z-CW157-006:** U.S. Army 1st Lt. Carstin Jerzak, a member of the South Dakota Army National Guard, shows Carmen Chase, of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, the medallion from the Standing Rock Tribe during the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration, Oct. 14, 2015, at the Pierre Indian Learning Center in Pierre, S.D. The celebration is in honor of the 67 Native American code talkers from South Dakota who helped win World War I and World War II by confusing the Germans with their Dakota/Lakota language. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



**151014-Z-CW157-008:** From left to right, Birdina Fox, Joseph Grass, Darren Tobacco and Nevada Walker, students from the Pierre Indian Learning Center, look at a Code Talker Congressional Medallion during the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration, Oct. 14, 2015, at the Pierre Indian Learning Center, in Pierre, S.D. The celebration is in honor of the 67 Native American code talkers from South Dakota who helped win World War I and World War II by confusing the Germans with their Dakota/Lakota language. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)

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